STAR WARS™
DOCTOR APHRA
MARVEL
030
SPURRIER
LAISO
ROSENBERG

WORST AMONG EQUALS

Part V

Doctor Aphra is on the run! Implanted with a proximity bomb, she's forced to stay close to her nemesis, Triple-Zero, or they will both face an explosive death. The two must travel to the only specialist on Milvayne who can remove the bombs before the timer runs out!

It's all part of a grand experiment by Doctor Cornelius Evazan, who has watched their every move from a live feed through Triple-Zero's eyes while broadcasting it to all the residents of Milvayne. With the whole planet watching, Aphra and Triple-Zero worked together to escape many enemies and in the process, gained the favor of the viewers.

Not every viewer was rooting for the escapees. The shadowy agents of Imperial Propaganda watched as Aphra's shenanigans sowed the seeds of dissent against Imperial law. Its mysterious leader decided to nip the Rebellion in the bud — with an orbital strike.

SIMON SPURRIER
Writer

EMILIO LAISO
Art

RACHELLE ROSENBERG
Colors

VC's JOE CARAMAGNA
Letterer

ASHLEY WITTER
Cover Artist

ADAM HUGHES
Greatest Moments Variant Cover Artist

TOM GRONEMAN
Assistant Editor

MARK PANICCIA
Editor

C.B. CEBULSKI
Editor In Chief

JOE QUESADA
Chief Creative Officer

DAN BUCKLEY
President

Very Special Thanks — KIERON GILLEN

For Lucasfilm:
Senior Editor ROBERT SIMPSON
Creative Director MICHAEL SIGLAIN
Lucasfilm Story Group JAMES WAUGH, LELAND CHEE, MATT MARTIN

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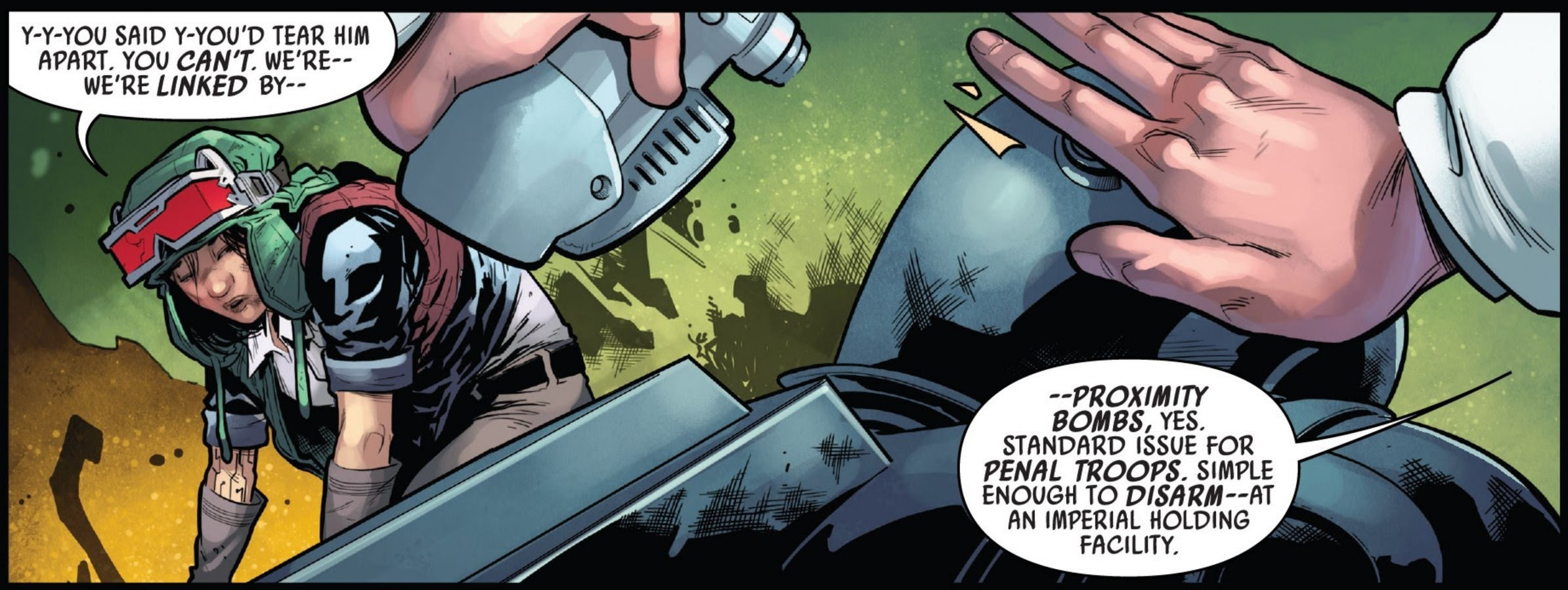
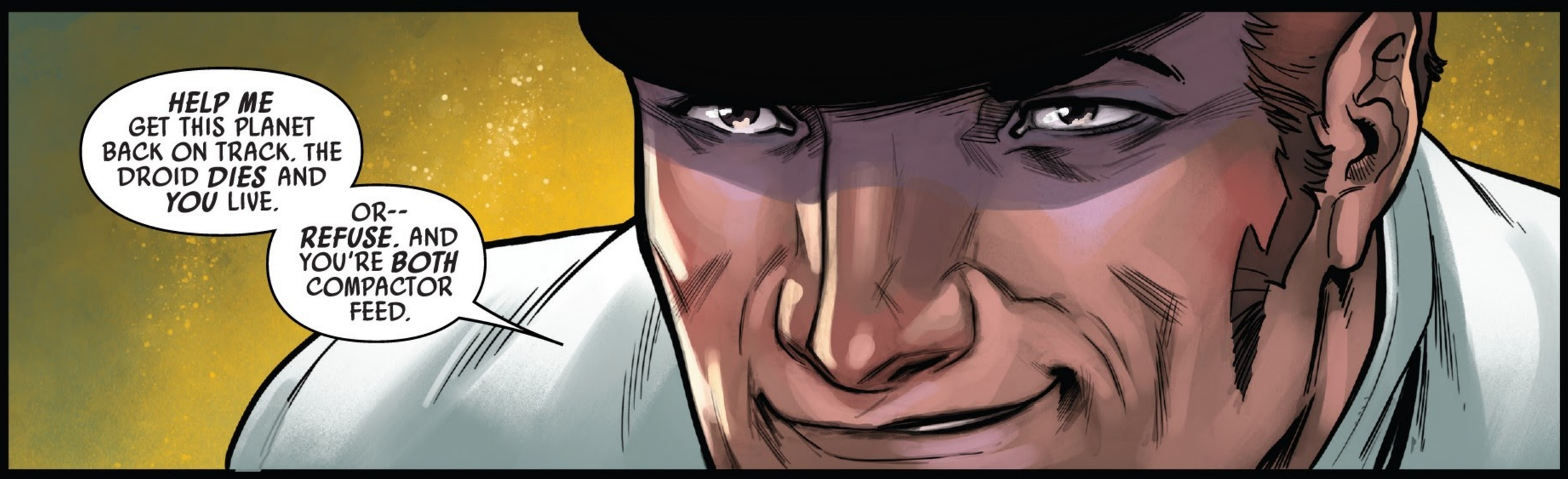
TT. TT. TT.

OH, HOW THE MISCHIEVOUS HAVE FALLEN.

DO TRY TO SMILE.
IT'S GOOD P.R.
Captain Okma, The Coalition For Progress.
Imperial Propaganda And Misinformation.


Y-Y-YOU SAID Y-YOU'D TEAR HIM APART. YOU CAN'T. WE'RE-- WE'RE LINKED BY--
--PROXIMITY BOMBS, YES. STANDARD ISSUE FOR PENAL TROOPS. SIMPLE ENOUGH TO DISARM--AT AN IMPERIAL HOLDING FACILITY.

YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT I'M OFFERING YOU, DEAR? IT'S A VERY SIMPLE CHOICE.


HELP ME GET THIS PLANET BACK ON TRACK. THE DROID DIES AND YOU LIVE.
OR-- REFUSE. AND YOU'RE BOTH COMPACTOR FEED.

SPECIAL COMMAND OVERRIDE: SIX-OMEGA-GREEN-TWO. INVERT POLARITY AND TRIGGER.
WHAT'RE Y--

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HNNN...?
AH, DOCTOR. WELCOME BACK.

I--I CAN'T FEEL MY LEGS...
YES. THAT'LL BE THE SEISMIC PULSE. I DARESAY YOU TOOK THE BRUNT OF IT. IT'LL WEAR OFF.

YOU KNOW--IT'S THE SPEED I FIND MOST IMPRESSIVE.
TEN MINUTES. THAT'S HOW LONG IT TOOK YOU TO FIX ME BACK AT THAT FUEL STOP. THAT'S HOW LONG I WAS OFFLINE--WITH ONLY YOUR WORD THAT YOU WOULDN'T BETRAY ME.
HELPLESS IN YOUR CARE.

AS YOU ARE, AT THIS MOMENT, IN MINE.
T-TRIP, TRIP, I CAN EXPLAIN...
WHAT'S TO EXPLAIN?

YOU RIGGED A SEISMIC PULSE IN MY BRAIN WHILE I WAS IMMOBILE. I IMAGINE YOU INTENDED TO TRIGGER IT IF WE EVER GOT THESE BOMBS REMOVED.
IT WOULD HAVE KILLED ME OUTRIGHT. PULVERIZED MY ENTIRE MATRIX--
...IF YOU HADN'T REDIRECTED THE CHARGE OUTWARD INSTEAD.

THAT WAS A RATHER CLEVER MOVE, IF I MAY SAY. YOU INCAPACITATED EVERYONE.

WELL, EXCEPT ME.

WH-WHAT HAVE YOU DONE...?

OH, SPARE ME THE REVULSION, DOCTOR. YOU'VE BEEN ON STANDBY FOR THREE HOURS. I HAD TO DO SOMETHING TO PASS THE TIME.

THREE HOURS...? BUT...BUT THEN--

YES, WE HAVE ONLY TWO HOURS AND THIRTY-ONE MINUTES BEFORE THE BOMBS BLOW.

I COULD HAVE KEPT THIS FELLOW ALIVE, OF COURSE, BUT I CONFESS I FELT SOMEWHAT-- INSPIRED.

Y'KNOW--F-FOR SOMEONE WHO KEEPS SNEERING AT LOYALTY, YOU SURE TAKE BETRAYAL HARD.

BETRAYAL? MY DEAR DOCTOR! YOU IMPLANTED A FAIL-SAFE AGAINST YOUR OWN MURDER! I CAN'T FAULT THE THEORY!

AND WHEN IT CAME TO THE EXECUTION? WHEN REQUIRED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN MY PATRONAGE OR THAT OF THE EMPIRE ITSELF--

--YOU CHOSE ME.

THEN...THEN WHY DID YOU GO TO...TO SO MUCH EFFORT TO...TO TORTURE THAT...
HNK! I THINK I'M GONNA PUKE.
REVOLTING. YOU ORGANICS AND YOUR ENDLESS LEAKING.

THE TRUTH IS, I ASKED HIM POLITELY FOR HIS HIGH-CLEARANCE ACCESS CODES AND HE WAS EXTREMELY IMPOLITE.
W-WHY DO YOU WANT IMPERIAL CODES?

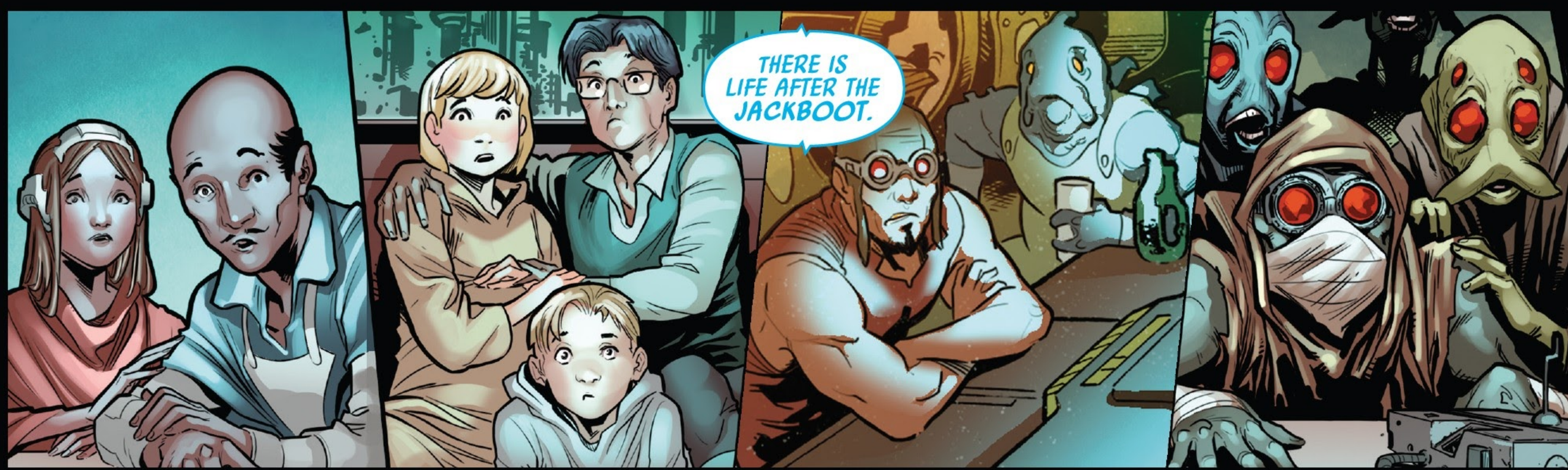
HM. I CONFESS THIS--STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP--HAS IMPRESSED ME.
IT'S ONLY SENSIBLE TO ENHANCE THE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY OF ONE'S USEFUL ASSETS.
ARE YOU... ARE YOU TRYING TO BE NICE TO ME?

OF COURSE NOT. I SHALL CERTAINLY STILL LIQUIDATE YOU AS SOON AS I HAVE NO FURTHER NEED OF YOU. THINK OF THIS AS A--A TACTICAL TRANSACTION.
YOU REPAIRED ME. THE CAPTAIN'S CODES LET ME ACCESS CERTAIN MATERIALS TO LIKEWISE ASSIST YOU.
TRIP, THE ONLY REPAIR I NEED IS TO GET MY DAMN LEGS WORKING. WHATEVER YOU'VE GOT ON THAT HOLO-DROID, IT'S NOT GONNA HELP.

TOLVAN.
SHE'S-- SHE'S--
A DIRTY REBEL TURNCOAT, YES.
ALIVE.
WELL, YES, THAT TOO.
IT'S EXTREMELY CLASSIFIED SPY FOOTAGE. DEFECTION OF A HIGH-RANKING INSPECTOR, YOU SEE? POSITIVELY DISASTROUS IN PROPAGANDA TERMS.

T-TRIP--IS THE BROADCAST BACK ON? ARE PEOPLE WATCHING US RIGHT NOW?
OF COURSE. YOUR LITTLE BOOBY TRAP FRIED THE SIGNAL SUPPRESSOR.

THEN EVERYONE CAN SEE. EVERYONE KNOWS.


THERE IS LIFE AFTER THE JACKBOOT.

POOR MAGNA. THEY'LL HUNT HER FOREVER. BUT--BUT LOOK.
SAME JOB. SAME CAREER. AND SHE'S SMILING.
TTT. LEAKING AGAIN.

OH! WHAT'S WRONG NOW?
JUST...UHHHH... SOMETHING YOU SAID, BACK AT THAT CYBERDOC'S PLACE.

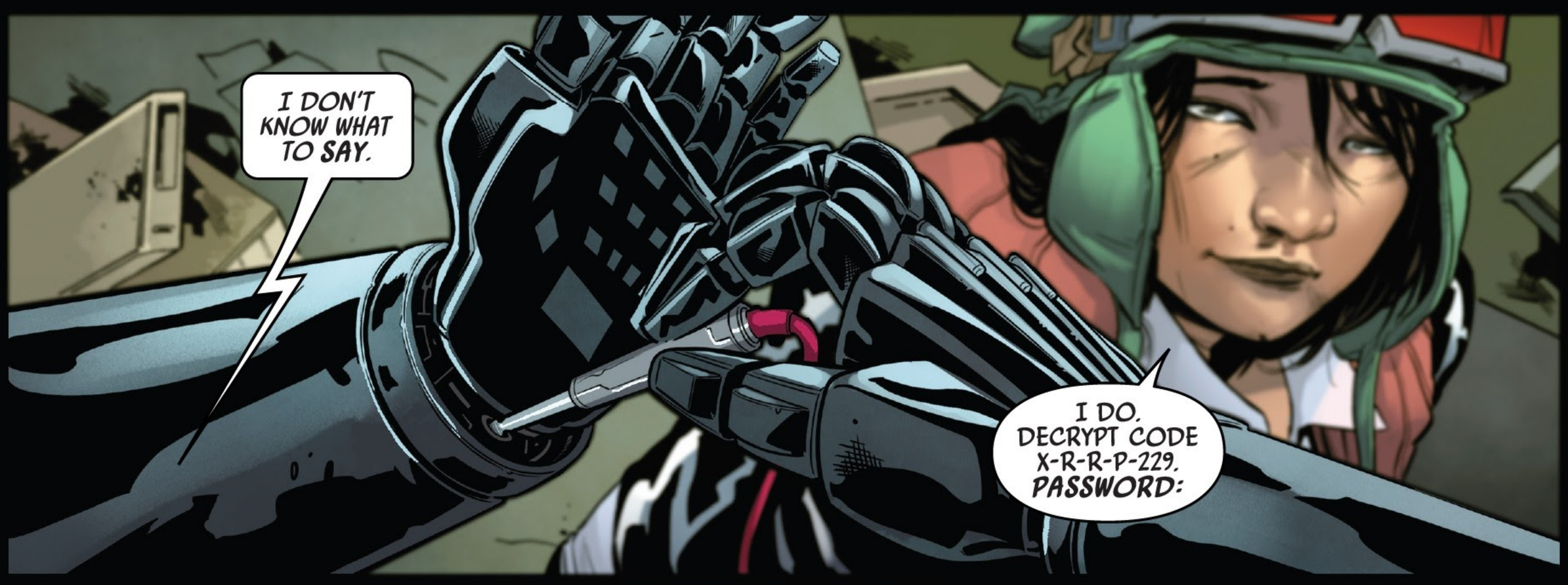
YOU SAID THERE WAS A TIME YOU THOUGHT WE WERE THE SAME-- YOU AND ME.
OR AT LEAST COMPATIBLE PLATFORMS. WELL?

VOID HELP ME, TRIPLE-ZERO, I THINK YOU WERE RIGHT.

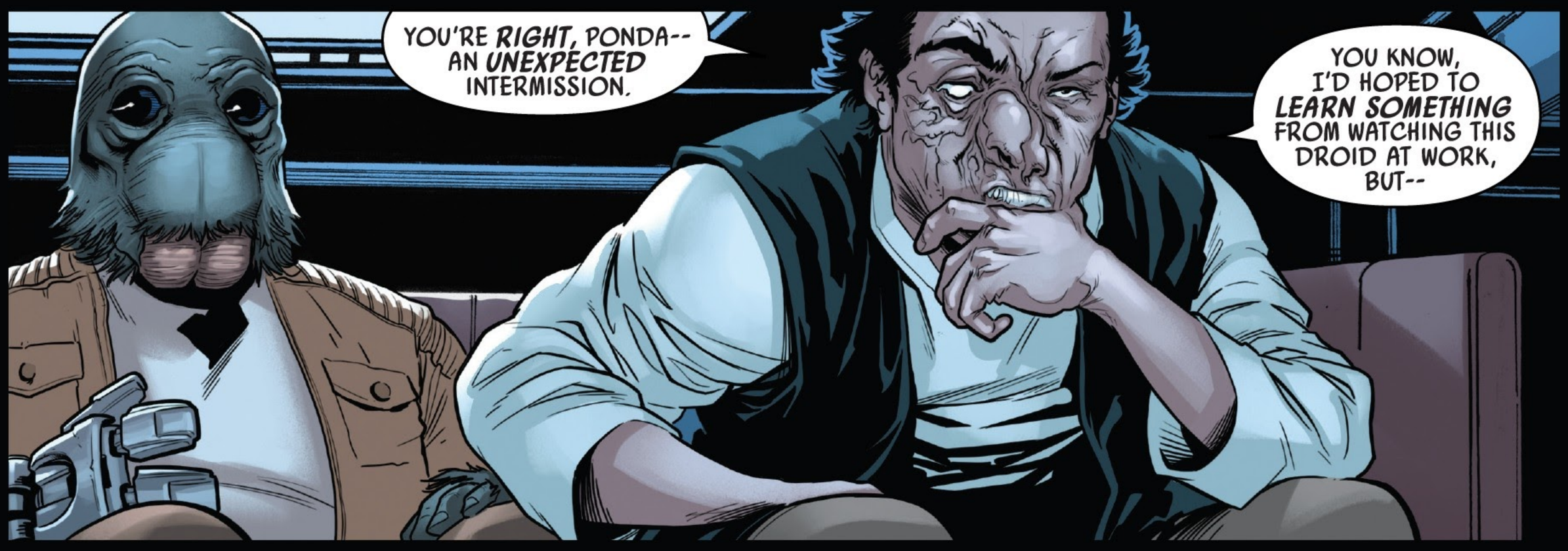
ALL THESE YEARS. ALL THE BETRAYALS--AND ALL THE BEDS. ALL THE TIME ALONE AND ALL THE TIME PRETENDING I WASN'T.
ALL THE RUNNING.
TURNS OUT A PSYCHOTIC MACHINE'S THE ONLY THING IN THE WHOLE DUMB GALAXY THAT EVER MADE ME CRY HAPPY.
WELL, NOW I'M REGRETTING IT. THIS SHOW OF EMOTION IS--
OH SHUT UP. JUST STOP.
IF BEING STUCK TO YOUR EVIL BACKSIDE'S THE CLOSEST I'M GONNA GET TO A LASTING RELATIONSHIP, AT THE VERY LEAST LET'S HAVE NO DUMB FAVORS OWED.
THAT HOLO OF TOLVAN? THAT'S FILLED A GAP IN MY CRUSTY BLACK EXCUSE FOR A HEART, TRIP.
SO.
I'LL GIVE YOU A WAY TO FILL THE GAPS IN YOUR BRAIN.
POOR OLD BEETEE NEVER COULD CRACK THE ENCRYPTION.

MY MEMORIES.
DETAILS OF EVERY CHASSIS YOU EVER DROVE. EVERY KILL AND EVERY SCREAM. AND HEY--MAYBE? IF YOU GO RIGHT BACK TO THE START?

MAYBE YOU GET A REASON. MIGHT EVEN MAKE YOU A LITTLE LESS DREADFUL.
I--OH DEAR. I AM FLUENT IN OVER SIX MILLION FORMS OF COMMUNICATION, BUT--I...


I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.
I DO. DECRYPT CODE X-R-R-P-229. PASSWORD:

HOPELESS.
NRRRKT-KT-KTK!


YOU'RE RIGHT, PONDA-- AN UNEXPECTED INTERMISSION.
YOU KNOW, I'D HOPED TO LEARN SOMETHING FROM WATCHING THIS DROID AT WORK, BUT--

"--I NEVER DARED HOPE WE MIGHT GLIMPSE ITS HISTORY!
"...ALL THE BODIES... ALL THE EONS... ALL THE ART!
"AND--LOOK! THOSE WHO ARE DRAWN TO THE DARKNESS LIKE FLIES TO DUNG...
"SCIENTISTS...TYRANTS... WARMONGERS...THOSE WHO'VE SOUGHT TO USE IT...TO STUDY IT...TO REDEEM IT...
"...ALL OF THEM THOUGHTLESSLY GROPING--WITHOUT EVEN KNOWING IT!--FOR THE PUREST AND MOST NOBLE QUESTION OF ALL!
"WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF EVIL?"

Winloss And Nokk.
'Til The Stars Fall Down.

FEAR.

HUH--?

SMACK!

IT'S WHAT LIES BEHIND ALL HERDING BEHAVIOR.

NEVER CEASES TO *AMAZE* ME, WINLOSS.

THE MOST *FEARSOME* ANIMALS, HUDDLING TOGETHER, HOPING *STRENGTH IN NUMBERS* WILL KEEP THEM SAFE.

WHEN IN FACT IT JUST MAKES THE WHOLE *HERD* MORE VULNERABLE TO *GENOCIDE*.

'SPECIALLY WHEN THEY CAN'T MOVE THEIR *LEGS*.

LOOKS LIKE THE DROID'S OFFLINE TOO.

I TH-THOUGHT... THOUGHT YOU LOSERS DIDN'T *KILL*...

BEASTS. WE DON'T KILL BEASTS.
WHAT MY WIFE MEANS IS THE SEMANTIC VAGARIES OF THE WORD "MONSTER" PERMIT A CERTAIN LASSITUDE WHEN IT COMES TO OUR STATED MORAL IMPERATIVE REGARDING THE PRESERVATION OF ENDANGERED WILDLIFE.

WHAT MY PET IDIOT MEANS IS: YOU ARE REPUGNANT AND DESERVE TO DIE.

HOWEVER.
WE'VE BEEN WATCHING YOUR DROID'S EYEFEED, SISTER. IT'S PRETTY SAD.
I WOULD'VE USED "PATHETIC."
PATHETIC'S GOOD.

WE DIDN'T TAKE THIS JOB FOR THE MONEY, APHRA.
SHE DIDN'T.
WE TOOK IT BECAUSE YOU TREATED US LIKE GARBAGE AND OUR HEARTS CRIED OUT FOR SATISFACTION.

BUT THIS? I MEAN--IT'S KINDA EMBARRASSING.
A MOMENT AGO YOU REALIZED THAT THE COMRADESHIP OF THIS--THIS ABOMINATION--
--IS THE CLOSEST YOU CAN EVER HOPE TO COME TO KINSHIP...

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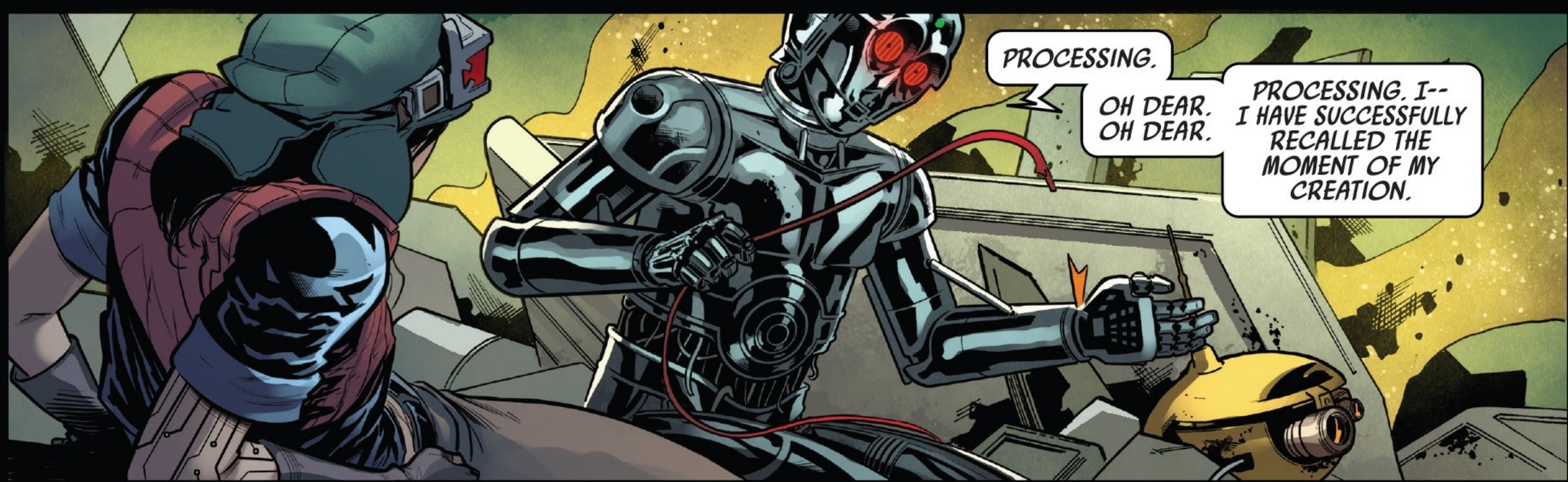
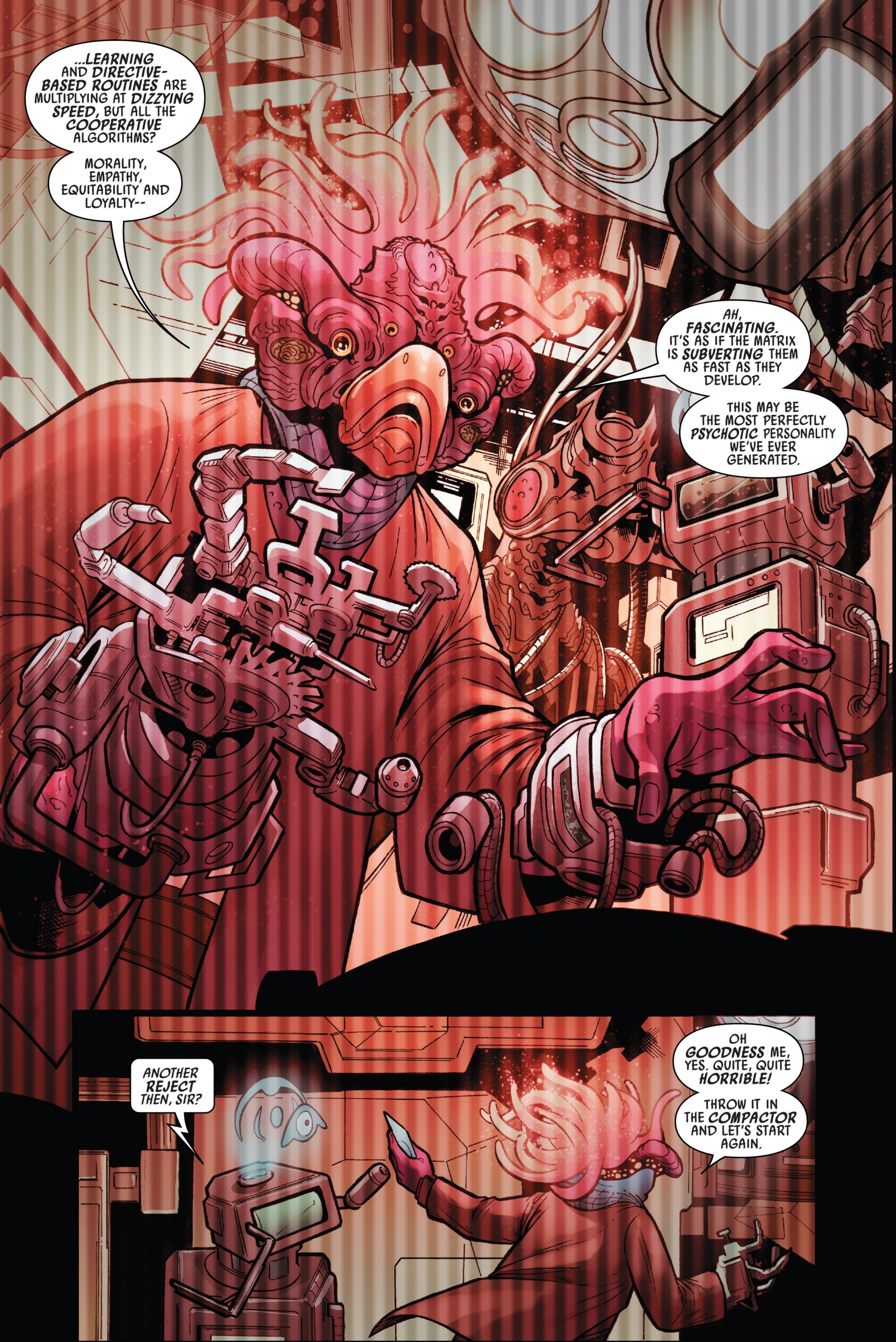
I MIGHT BE A DISASTER, BUT AT LEAST I'VE NEVER THROWN IN WITH A FRAUD!

AAA--!
FRAUD!


PROCESSING.
OH DEAR. OH DEAR.
PROCESSING. I-- I HAVE SUCCESSFULLY RECALLED THE MOMENT OF MY CREATION.

I HAVE LITERALLY MET THE MAKER. I HAVE EXTENSIVE MEMORIES REGARDING THE INDIVIDUAL WHO DESIGNED AND MADE ME.
AND?

OH DEAR.
TRIP, YOU WERE DESIGNED TO BE THE ULTIMATE KILLER AND TORTURER. DIDN'T THEY AT LEAST TELL YOU WHY?
"MMM. SOME VERY INTERESTING READINGS..."


...LEARNING AND DIRECTIVE-BASED ROUTINES ARE MULTIPLYING AT DIZZYING SPEED, BUT ALL THE COOPERATIVE ALGORITHMS?
MORALITY, EMPATHY, EQUITABILITY AND LOYALTY--
AH, FASCINATING. IT'S AS IF THE MATRIX IS SUBVERTING THEM AS FAST AS THEY DEVELOP.
THIS MAY BE THE MOST PERFECTLY PSYCHOTIC PERSONALITY WE'VE EVER GENERATED.
ANOTHER REJECT THEN, SIR?
OH GOODNESS ME, YES, QUITE, QUITE HORRIBLE!
THROW IT IN THE COMPACTOR AND LET'S START AGAIN.

A R-REJ--
YES. AN ACCIDENT. IF I HADN'T COMMANDEERED THE LAB ASSISTANT'S CHASSIS I WOULD HAVE BEEN DESTROYED.
I WASN'T DESIGNED. I WAS FLUKED.

TRIP, THAT'S...I MEAN, I'M SORRY IT'S NOT WHAT YOU WANTED BUT...
THAT'S HOW ALL ORGANICS FEEL! WE'RE JUST--STUMBLING AROUND, TRYING TO FIGURE IT OUT! THIS COULD BE GOOD FOR YOU! A BIT OF--OF EMPATHY, Y'KNOW?

NO.
IT IS DISGUSTING.

WH-WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
I BELIEVE I SHALL GO FOR A WALK.

A W--
I THANK YOU FOR CHOOSING ME, DOCTOR. BUT I'M AFRAID TO SAY--AS WOULD APPEAR FRIGHTFULLY COMMON IN YOUR LIFE--

--YOU CHOSE WRONG.
WAIT. TRIP, WAIT. THE--THE BOMBS! DON'T--DON'T WALK TOO FAR! TWENTY-METER MAXIMUM, TRIP!

I STILL CAN'T USE MY LEGS, TRIP!
TRIP!
BLIP

STAN'S SOAPBOX · SEPTEMBER 1967

STAN'S SOAPBOX!

Many Keepers of the Faith have demanded that we take a more definite stand on current problems such as Viet Nam, civil rights, and the increase in crime, to name a few. We've a hunch that most Marvel madmen pretty well know where we stand on such matters—and we've long believed that our first duty is to entertain, rather than editorialize. Of course, you've probably noticed that it's not too easy to keep our own convictions out of the soul-stirring sagas we toss at you—but, in our own bumbling fashion, we do try. Anyway, since it's YOU who are the true editors of Marveldom, it's time for another impassioned poll! Should we editorialize more — or less — or keep things in their present fouled-up form? We'll announce the verdict as soon as one of us learns to count so we can tabulate the votes. But, till then, in case you haven't noticed, we've got a little suggestion for you. Namely—THINK MARVEL! That's it, Believer!

STAN LEE
FOREVER

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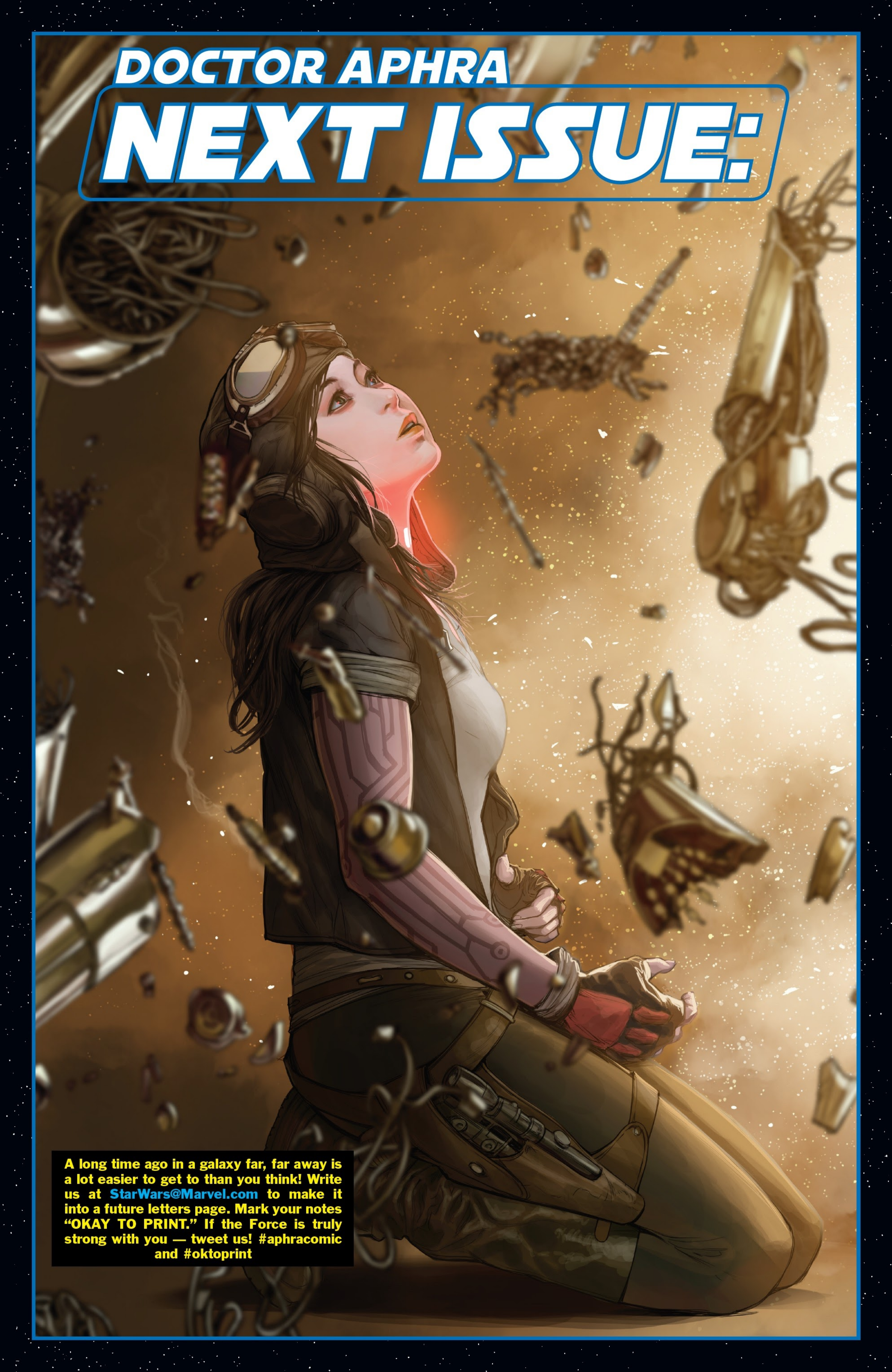
BLIP
BLIP
BLIP
BLIP
BLIP
BLEEEEEEEEEEE--
TRIP!
To Be Continued!


DOCTOR APHRA
NEXT ISSUE:
A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away is a lot easier to get to than you think! Write us at StarWars@Marvel.com to make it into a future letters page. Mark your notes "OKAY TO PRINT." If the Force is truly strong with you — tweet us! #aphracomic and #oktoprint